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ABSTRACT

This study examined the reading habits of 301 fourth-grade pupils in Israel. The objective was to investigate the relationship between the type of school library and the pupils' reading habits over the long range. The hypothesis was that pupils who have a central library in their school together with classroom collections read more than pupils whose school has only a central library or only classroom collections. Reading was measured by amount of reading, average number of hours per day devoted to free reading, and having library-borrowed books at home. The sample included: (1) children who participated in a class-library project in grades 2-3, with a central library also existing in the school; (2) children who participated in a class-library project in grades 2-3, with no central library in the school; and (3) children who did not participate in a class-library project, while having a central library in the school. A certain contribution of the class-library project was apparent, but the realization of this contribution depends on the existence of a central library in the school. A class library is not a substitute for a central collection, although it can constitute one approach among several that can encourage children reading. (Author/MES)

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Classroom collections and reading patterns

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Abstract

The elementary school regards the development of reading skills and the cultivation of free reading among pupils as one of its tasks. One of the ways of achieving this is to operate libraries in the school. Some schools provide only a central library, while others believe in operating classroom collections in the elementary grades, so as increase childrens' exposure to books and reading. The reading habits of 301 fourth-grade pupils in Israel were examined. The sample included: (a) children who participated in a class library project in grades 2-3, with a central library also existing in the school; (b) children who participated in a class-library project in grades 2-3, with no central library in the school; and (c) children who did not participate in a class-library project, while having a central library in the school. A certain contribution of the class library project is apparent, but the realization of this contribution depends on the existence of a central library in the school. A class library is not a substitute for a central collection, though it can constitute one approach among several that can encourage children reading.

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Paper

Introduction

Children read to satisfy the natural urge of curiosity and to broaden their

understanding of the world they live in. Reading satisfies additional needs of the child: coping with challenges, a sense of security, gaining approval, a sense of belonging, being loved, the quest for identity, and identification with historical figures or fictional characters. Stephen Krashen (1993) summarizes studies that indicate the power of reading. Research results have shown that reading contributes to improvement of vocabulary, spelling, writing style, reading comprehension, and of grammatical development.

Daniel Boorstin (1984) maintains that free reading, or the lack of it, is what determines a society's extent of advancement and enlightenment, cultural characteristics, and capacity for intellectual self-rule: therefore, one of the goals of an enlightened society is that its members will be "readers for pleasure" or "free readers." The process of becoming a free reader is a gradual one. Chall (1983) posits six stages through which the child passes from becoming reader to skilled reader, and ultimately to free reader:

Stage 0: Prereading: the preparing stage - occurs during the preschool age - birth to age 6.

Stage 1: Initial reading, or decoding stage - occurs during grade 1-2, ages 6-7. The essential aspect of stage 1 is learning the arbitrary set of letters and associating these with the corresponding parts of the spoken words.

Stage 2: Confirmation, fluency, ungluing from the print - occurs during grades 2-3, ages 7-8. Reading in stage 2 consolidates what was learning in stage 1.

Stage 3: Reading for learning the new - new knowledge, information thoughts and experiences - occurs during grades 4-8.

Stage 4: The stage of having multiple viewpoints - occurs during high school, ages 14-18.

Stage 5: Construction and reconstruction - occurs during college/ university, age 18 and above. In this stage the reader is able to use selectively the printed material in those areas of knowledge central to one's concern.

Chall argues that stage 2, that of fluency, which occurs during grades 2-3, is the focus of interest as far as reading for pleasure concerned. The transformation of a beginning reader into a free reader is dependent on this stage.

Anderson, Wilson and Fielding (1988) found that the measure of the amount of time devoted to reading in the period from grade 2 to grade 5 is the best predictor of the child"s development as a reader. Morrow (1983) maintains that reading habits take shape up to grade 6. At that age, the child's "reading type" is already an irreversible fact. Hence, the development of reading skills and the cultivation of free reading among pupils form one of the main task, of the elementary school.

Schools employ motivational reading activities of various kinds:

A. Providing children with opportunities, time, and materials to engage in book-related activities by:

- Placing large selection of popular books in school, e.g., "book flood" projects in New Zealand and Great Britain
- Present literature to children daily
- Free silent reading in class Reading aloud in class

- Discussion of books with teachers or librarians

B. b. Creative activities:

- Sharing books through written or oral communication, in visual form, or by videos, displays, etc.
- Having children make their own books Using creative storytelling techniques , e.g., puppet shows, music stories

C. Activities that encourage reading outside of school:

- Reading time outside the classroom, such as reading at home specified as an assignment, or reading with a parent.

One of the ways to encourage reading is to operate libraries in the school. Librarians believe that this enriches the print environment and results in more reading.

Some schools provide only a central library that constitutes an inclusive resource center and serves all the grades in the school with their different needs. Some societies or locales, however, also believe in providing classroom collections in the elementary grades, so as to increase children's exposure to books and reading.

The classroom collection, which is usually situated in a specially designated area of the room, generally consists of fictional materials as well as a number of non-fiction and/or reference books, the proportiopn between them depending on the school. The existence of such a classroom collection, housed and presented in the appropriate conditions, can create a congenial atmosphere, conducive to reading. One of the weaknesses of this arrangement lies in the fact that the classroom collection is, of necessity, limited.

Studies conducted in various environments, e.g., kindergarten, day-care centers and elementary school classrooms have shown a certain amount of evidence of the influence of classroom collections on children's reading patterns, when in conjunction with the implementation of regularly scheduled literary-based activities.

In Israel, the Ministry of Education initiated twelve years ago a class-library project for first through third grades. The original motivation was to encourage improvement in reading comprehension skills, as at that time elementary school libraries were not well developed. Over the years the situation of elementary school libraries has improved, while simultanously the concept of classroom collections has developed and become an integral part of the approach known as "Language as a whole". In this approach the acquirement of reading skills is perceived as a natural process instead of a technical one. In the framework of this approach, a gradual transition has taken place from the use of traditional "readers" (textbooks) to the use of fictional books in classroom reading instruction. The classroom collection is especially utilized in this way, with the work of the teacher centering on the collection. Children are allowed free access to the collection, with groups of children reading the same book, or a number of books on the same topic. The children then discuss what they have read, report on their reading to the class, or even write a similar "book" of their own.

Hundreds of classrooms across Israel actively participate in this project, which is coordinated by a project manager in cooperation with a professional committee whose task it is to choose the appropriate books to be included in the classroom

collection. The books are then centrally purchased by the Ministry of Education and distributed to the schools. Only schools which also possess a central library are allowed to participate in the project. Schools that do not officially participate in the project have also developed classroom collections at their own expense, thereby making such collections the norm in a majority of Israeli elementary schools.

The Study

Despite the possible importance of class libraries, only a small number of studies have assessed their effects. Most of these studies focused on children's reading habits while they were participating in a class-library project, but not on the long-range effects of the projects. The present study's objective was to investigate the relations between the type of school library and the pupils' reading habits over the long range.

The study's hypothesis

Pupils who have a central library in their school together with classroom collections read more than pupils whose school has only a central library or only classroom collection.
Reading was measured by:

1. Amount of reading
2. Average number of hours per day devoted to free reading
3. Having library-borrowed books at home

Research design

Questionarries were distributed among a sample of 301 fourth-grade pupils from four elementary schools. The socio-demographic characteristics of the four schools pupils were quite similar: center of the country, urban areas, middle-class. The sample included:

A. children who participated in the class-library project in grades 2-3, with a central library also existing in the school (107 pupils)

B. children who participated in the class-library project in the grades 2-3, with no central library in the school, but with classroom collection in all the classes including the forth grade (91 pupils)

C. children who did not participate in a class-library project, while having a central library in the school (103 pupils)

Some 6.3% of the subjects (19) did not have books for free reading of their own, 24% (72) had only few reading books at home, and 69.7% (209) had many private books at home (see Table 1) (Reading books exclude reference and non fiction materials). Comparing the pupils by their school libraies reveals a picture that is largely similar, although few more books were owned by pupils in whose schools there were central libraries only and more books by pupils whose schools had central libraries and who had also undergone a class library project in grades 2-3, hereafter referred to as combined libraries.

Table 1 Amount of Private Books by Type of Library

No. of Reading Books at Home	Combined Libraries	Central Library	Classroom Libraries	Total
No books	9 (8.5%)	5 (4.9%)	5 (5.5%)	19 (6.3%)
Few	18 (17%)	26 (25.2%)	28 (30.8%)	72 (24%)
Many	79 (74.5%)	72 (69.9%)	58 (63.7%)	209 (69.7%)
	n= 106	n=103	n=91	n=300

Results

In table 2 amount of book reading by the study subjects is detailed according to type of library in the school. The table shows that the percentages of pupils who could be called intensive readers (reading 1-2 books per week) are similar between pupils in schools with class libraries only (72.6%) and pupils in schools with combined libraries (69.2%). In schools with a central library only, only 60.8 of the pupils responded that they read at least one book per week. As for reading at least one book every two weeks, the percentages are 96.3% of pupils in schools with combined libraries, 93.5% of pupils in schools with a class library only, and 83.3% of pupils in schools with a central library only.

Table 2 Amount of Books Read According to Type of Library

	Classroom Libraries	Central Library	Combined Libraries	Total
2+ books per week	34 (37.4%)	32 (32.4%)	22 (20.6%)	88 (29.3%)
1 book per week	32 (35.2%)	30 (29.4%)	52 (48.6%)	114 (38.0%)
1 book per 2 weeks	19 (20.9%)	23 (22.5%)	29 (27.1%)	71 (23.7%)
1 book per 2 month	4 (4.4%)	12 (11.8%)	4 (3.7%)	20 (6.7%)
1 book per ½ year	2 (2.2%)	5 (4.9%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (2.3%)
	n=91	n=102	n=107	n=300

Regarding "low readers" among the pupils, again we find that more of the pupils from schools with a central library only (16.7%) stated that they read little (one book per two months to half a year), compared to only 6.6% of the pupils from schools with class libraries only and 3.7% of the pupils from schools with combined libraries.

In terms of how much time pupils devote to free reading activities, a similar picture emerges (see Table 3). Much reading - more than two hours per day was done by 18% to 19% of the pupils. Some 70% of the pupils in schools with class libraries only devote a half hour to an hour per day to reading, compared to 76.7% of the pupils in schools with central libraries only and 81.3% of the pupils in schools with combined libraries. Pupils who read a half-hour or more per day include 99% of those from schools with combined libraries, 95% of those from schools with a central library only, and 89% of those from schools with class libraries only.

Table 3 Average Number of Hours per Day Devoted by Pupils to Reading by Type of Library

Reading Time	Classroom Libraries	Central Library	Combined Libraries	Total
Over 2 hour	17 (18.9%)	20 (19.4%)	19 (17.8%)	56 (18.7%)
One hour	31 (34.4%)	42 (40.8%)	46 (43.0%)	119 (39.7%)
0.5 hour	32 (36.6%)	37 (35.9%)	41 (38.3%)	110 (36.7%)
No reading	10 (11.1%)	4 (3.9%)	1 (1.0%)	15 (5.0%)
	n=90	n=103	n=107	n=300

Pupils were asked whether there existed at present in their home a book they had borrowed from a library of any sort. Among 23.1% of those whose schools had class libraries only, no book borrowed from any library existed at the moment in their home; the figures were 14.6% for pupils in schools with central libraries only, and 9.3% for pupils in schools with combined libraries (see Table 4). In otherwords, 91% of the pupils in schools with combined libraries had a library book in their home, compared to 85% of pupils in schools with a central library only and 77% of pupils in schools with class libraries only.

Table 4 Having a Library Book at Home

Having a Library Book	Classroom Libraries	Central Library	Combined Libraries	Total
No books	21 (23.1%)	15 (14.6%)	10 (9.3%)	46 (15.3%)
From the classroom library	29 (31.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	29 (31.8%)
From the central library	0 (0.0%)	83 (80.6%)	94 (87.9%)	177 (59%)
From the public library	55 (60.4%)	25 (24.3%)	15 (14.0%)	95 (32.0%)
	n=91	n=103	n=107	n=301

The percentages of pupils who had more than one library book in their home were at least 14% of the pupils in schools with combined libraries, 24% of the schools with a central library only, and 32% of the pupils in schools with calss libraries only. A large precentage (over 80%) of pupils in schools with a central library only had a book borrowed from the central library in their home, and even more (88%) of the pupils in schools with combined libraries.

Pupils in elementary schools possessing combined libraries, visit the central library more frequently than pupils in schools that have only a central library (Table 5). While 88.6% of children in elementary schools possessing combined libraries visit the central library in their school at least once a week, only 62.7% of pupils in schools that have only a central library, visit their facility school at least once a week.

In terms of books borrowed from the public library, an almost converse picture emerges. Only 14% of the pupils in schools with combined libraries had at the time of the study a reading book from the public library, compared to 24% of the pupils in schools with a central library only and 60% of the pupils in schools with class library only.

Table 5 Visits to the Central Library

Visit to the Central Library	Central Library	Combined Library	Total
Twice a week	49 (48.0%)	84 (79.2%)	133 (44.6%)
Once a week	15 (14.7%)	10 (9.4%)	25 (8.4%)
Once in two weeks	19 (18.6%)	4 (3.8%)	23 (7.7%)
Once a month	19 (18.6%)	8 (7.5%)	27 (9.1%)
	n=102	n=106	n=208

A check revealed that 24.3% of the pupils in schools with combined libraries were registered at the public library, compared to 39.85% of the pupils in schools with a central library only and 67% of the pupils in schools with class library only. The fact that among pupils in schools with class libraries only the registration in and borrowing of books from public libraries is higher that among the other two categories of pupils is probably connected to the fact that the former type of pupils lack a central library in their school. The lack of a central library in their schools, caused them to look for other source for book, outside of the school.

Discussion

The disparities in reading among pupils in schools with the different kind of libraries are not drastic. In reporting on amount of reading, the pupils in schools with combined libraries score highest, and the pupils in schools with class libraries only are a close second. With respect to time devoted to reading, similar percentages (18% to 19%) of intensive readers are found. In terms of pupils who devoted half an hour to an hour per day to reading, the ranking is: combined libraries 81.3%, central libraries, 76.7%, classes library, 70%.

The criterion of having a library-borrowed book in the home also finds combined libraries in the highest place (91%), followed by central libraries (85%) and classes libraries (77%). It should be remembered that class libraries are small, and their collections are limited compared to central school libraries or public libraries. However, central libraries are more accessible to pupils than public libraries.

It is important to note that the class library project was held while pupils were in grades 2-3, but may still have exerted an influence the following year, in which the children no longer had class libraries but did have access to the central library. Thus, it may be that a certain contribution of the class library project to children's reading emerges, but the realization of this contribution depends on the existence of a central library in the school.

A class library is not a substitute for a central collection, with its variety and different levels of material, and services of a professional librarian. A class library can only constitute one approach among different approaches that can encourage children reading.

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